

Dogs and cats need to eat raw meaty bones - vet

Justine Doherty
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Vet Tom Lonsdale at his Richmond surgery with Katie and Cookie, Tom with Sharlee, Maureen with Kouta and Molly and Vet nurse Bianca Paterson with Oscar. Picture: Geoff Jones

The ads on TV show a massive bright kitchen, a bounding doggy or velvet cat padding over sparkling floors to a sleek woman neatly dispensing kibble or canned food into a gleaming bowl.

But instead of this glamorised, sanitised scenario, Bligh Park vet Tom Lonsdale wants to see the sleek woman lobbing a sheep's head out on the grass.

Herein lies a problem of Dr Lonsdale's campaign – the raw meaty bones he advocates for our pets are bulkier than pet food and often not pretty.

Dr Lonsdale has been on a mission since 1991 to educate pet owners about the dangers of manufactured pet food and to teach pet owners to go back to nature when feeding them.

He said our dogs and our cats are slowly dying from the manufactured food we are feeding them, which he said causes catastrophic gum disease, diabetes and heart problems.

“Dogs are modified wolves and cats are modified desert predators,” he said. “They need to rip and tear carcasses to keep their teeth and gums healthy.

“Feeding frenzy stimulates brain chemicals which give a natural high, which conditions the immune and digestive systems,” he said.

He said feeding your pet only on processed pet food is the equivalent of feeding your children fast food at every meal. He said pet food contains carbohydrates and preservatives, and often protein and fats in damaging proportions.

When dogs with advanced gum disease from years of processed pet food present at his surgery, he often pulls almost all the teeth out, a procedure which costs between \$500-\$1000. But when combined with a raw meaty bones diet, the treatment completely turns the animals' health around.



One of Maureen Powell's dogs hoes into a chicken frame at Dr Lonsdale's Richmond surgery.

Picture: Geoff Jones

So incensed was he by what he saw in his practice and deduced about the mass unwellness of Australian pets he sold his practice in 1997 and toured America, the UK and China giving lectures on why we should stop feeding pet food that actually makes your pet unwell.

In his campaign he has appeared on many TV shows over the years, notably Midday with Ray Martin, Current Affair, and last March, Lateline on ABC TV. He has also battled at length to reveal sponsorship deals between university veterinary schools and pet food companies.

His 26-year crusade is documented in detail on his website www.rawmeatybones.com including documents obtained by freedom of information requests from universities with veterinary teaching schools which reveal sponsorship deals with pet food companies.

He said he was defeated by University of Sydney in the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal as it ruled it was not in the public interest to disclose the information he sought.

While Dr Lonsdale is often the most visible campaigner on the need to feed pets natural food, he's not the only one putting their hand up. In March last year ABC program Lateline presented a segment on a study conducted by the University of Sydney and published in the Australian Veterinary Journal.

The study said nine manufactured cat foods didn't adhere to nutrition standards and could cause severe disease, but the authors would not disclose which brands they were. The program highlighted the relationship between pet food companies and university veterinary schools and included comment from Dr Lonsdale.

Dr Lonsdale also showed the Gazette documents on a current class action in California which he said is just the beginning of the coming backlash of outraged pet owners against the pet food industry.

The action is against Mars Petcare, Nestle Purina Petcare, Hills Pet Nutrition and others who sell "prescription" dog food which the plaintiffs say is sold at a premium price when it has "no drug or other ingredient not also common in non-prescription pet food", labelling the practice as deceptive, collusive, and in violation of consumer protection laws.

Dr Lonsdale has been criticised himself by the pet food companies he attacks, for selling the food he advocates. He defended that fact to the Gazette on Friday. “I only started selling it five years ago,” he said. “Dogs on this diet are so healthy, we lose business.”

Gesturing at the big chest freezers in his Richmond practice with chicken, lamb, kangaroo, rabbit, goat and ox parts, he said “this is partly an economic decision” due to the loss of business from his pet clients becoming healthier, but he said pet owners are also more likely to take up the new feeding concept if it’s easy to access the right foods.

“You don’t have to buy it here though – you can go to Red Lea and get cheaper chicken frames in bulk, but you have to wrap them yourself.” His are individually wrapped to keep them separate in the freezer.



A quail frame, more suitable for little dogs or cats.

He said you can also get chicken wings and necks at the supermarket, and there are other outlets around.

When asked about the cringe-factor of feeding sheep heads and other body parts, his gaze remained steady and he said “people just need to re-conceptualise” what pet food looks like.

While some academics such as University of Sydney’s feline vet expert Dr Richard Malik have publicly supported Dr Lonsdale’s crusade, the Gazette asked why he still appeared to be a lone voice in the wilderness on the pet feeding issue.

“On the one hand I’m a lone voice in the wilderness; but on the other hand I’m the gathering storm,” he said.

Pitt Town convert

Maureen Powell of Pitt Town has five rescue dogs and can’t speak highly enough of the raw meaty bones diet she has fed them the last four years.

“I’m not passionate about a lot of things but I’m passionate about this food,” she said of her dogs’ diet of chicken and quail frames, ’roo tails and rabbits with the skin on.

Looking at her dogs, she said “I have two words to describe it – living proof”.



Some of the tucker on offer in Dr Lonsdale's Richmond surgery.

All her dogs are from the pound or rescue organisations. She first went to Dr Lonsdale to have one of them checked out.

“I’d fed dogs tins and kibble for years, and the dogs would get diarrhoea, bad breath and die early, but when Tom told me about what I should be feeding them it was a light bulb moment.”

When she took Pomeranian Cookie to him, he said he was possibly too far gone, he was in such a bad way. But Ms Powell wanted to do what she could and so Dr Lonsdale removed all his diseased teeth, leaving only the front incisors and a back one on each side. Today he is 17 and very healthy, and can eat a quail frame in a matter of minutes.



Dr Lonsdale said dogs love the sheep heads, and demolish the lot except for the teeth.

“They are so healthy now – their business is never sloppy, they have no bad breath, and they’re more calm,” Ms Powell said. “The only time I bring them to the surgery is to have them boarded. I’m absolutely convinced that it’s the food that’s made the difference.”

What does the RSPCA say?

While the RSPCA website says “the basis of your dog's diet should be a high quality balanced premium dog food”, it also says to “check that it complies with the Australian Standard: Manufacturing and Marketing Pet Food AS 5812:2011.”

It advises supplementing with bones but recommends you choose “human-grade raw meat and raw meaty bones because some pet meat/pet mince/pet rolls/pet meat and bone products can contain preservatives that can be detrimental to the dog's health (e.g. sulphite preservative induced thiamine deficiency which can be fatal).”.

What do wolves eat?

In Mr Lonsdale's book Raw Meaty Bones he quotes the observations of a zookeeper from two zoo parks in the UK who wrote what different wild species eat when given a whole carcass of different animals.

Timber wolves were given carcasses of calves, horses, deer and goats, as well as rabbits, fish and chicken. Of the big carcasses, they usually leave the rumen and colon; most bones from young animals are eaten as well except for the larger bones which are gnawed at the ends.

Rabbits are sometimes eaten completely, other times the fur is left. Fish are eaten completely. Chicken turned inside out and eaten.

What to feed your pet

Wherever possible feed the meat and bone in one large piece, requiring ripping, tearing and gnawing.

Adult dogs: chicken frames, quail frames for smaller dogs, rabbits, hearts, rabbit heads, lamb heads, calf heads, ox offal – tripe, gullets, liver and lungs, pigs' trotters and heads, rats, mice, kangaroo tails, goat necks and testes.

How to feed dogs: feed once a day, preferably at night to avoid flies and ants. Fast your dog one or two days a week, but not if underweight. Do not feed liver more than once a week. Avoid pieces with a lot of fat. Do not feed large shank bones as they are more likely to break teeth on them. Do not feed bones sawn in half to reveal marrow as it is also a tooth breakage risk. Large pieces like kangaroo rib cages and shoulders can be put back in the fridge after a meal to keep it fresh.

Puppies: raw chicken wings, oxtail, chicken necks.

Cats: raw food for cats should always be fresh whereas dogs can consume 'ripe' food. Do not fast cats. They need food suitable to their size, such as whole rats, mice, raw chicken wings or necks, quail frames.